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ABSTRACT

Recent emphasis on industrial and urban development is described as a factor contributing to the greatly accelerated flight from the land. The concept of rural redevelopment is examined along with educational policy changes needed for rural redevelopment. The author's stated opinion is that rural redevelopment in the United States and other industrial countries should involve (1) the creation of a viable economic base, (2) institution building to provide adequate community facilities and services, and (3) providing more adequate bases for personal growth. Educational policy changes needed for rural redevelopment are described in terms of the economic base, institution building in rural communities, adult education programs, structural changes in developing human resources needed in the public schools, changes in tax policies, changes in personnel policies, organizational changes, curriculum changes, and educational policies affecting personal development. The author suggests a parity with suburbia rather than a neo-agrarian policy. (PS)

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# Educational Policy and Rural Re-development in Post-industrial Society: The Case of the United States of America

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## Introduction

Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, approximately 200 years ago, emphasis in the USA and other Western nations has been upon industrial and urban development. The phenomenal growth of science and technology was a central factor. Applied to manufacturing this created a great demand for labor in urban centers. Applied to commercial agricultural production labor needs shrank. One result was a tremendous shift of population from the country side to the city. In the USA during the last 50 years approximately 40,000,000 people made the move on a permanent basis, one of the largest migrations in human history.

Educational policies, mostly of an implicit nature, facilitated the migration by placing professional occupations and college training on a pedestal and in other more subtle ways. The mass media have had an impact too but before radio and TV when communication of ideas was largely based on personal contact and the written words, the school probably had more influence by raising literacy and planting the seeds of discontent with farming and rural life.

Throughout the period there have been advocates of rural life, including Gifford Pinchot, Kenyon Butterfield and other notables who served on Theodore Roosevelt's 1907-9 Country Life Commission, and Ralph Borsodi, O. E. Baker and other rural fundamentalists who advocated a return to the land during the 1930's. The Congress of the United States has justified a great deal of legislation, including the Preemption Act of 1841, the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 and subsequent measures to support farm prices, the Rural Electrification Act of 1936, Farm Credit, Soil Conservation etc., on the grounds that they would help to preserve the family farm which was viewed as a desirable way of life and "the seed bed of the nation's population" as well as the basic source of our food and fiber.

Historically, the formal educational drive to modernize the nation's agriculture began with the establishment of the Land Grant Colleges by

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the Morrill Act of 1862. These colleges have played major roles in the development and dissemination of agricultural innovations. The Cooperative Extension Services handled a major share of the educational aspects of the diffusion process. Other aspects of diffusion were handled by the resident teachers in the colleges of agriculture, by high school vocational agriculture teachers, by other public agencies and by private firms.

Regardless of declared intent, the net effect of these laws, programs and activities and, in fact, of the technological revolution as a whole, has been to increase the efficiency of agricultural production and concurrently the economic risks of commercial farming. These developmen' have greatly accelerated the flight from the land.

Recently, due in part to automation, which is regarded by some social scientists as the third phase of the Industrial Revolution, the labor requirements of industry have failed to keep pace with the expanding labor supply so that urban jobs are not as plentiful as in the past. Also a burgeoning interest in environmental quality has evidently caused many metropolitan residents to have second thoughts about the desirability of living in congested places. Consequently, there appears to be a renewal of interest in the countryside, Up to the present time, this has been reflected, as far as residence is concerned, mainly in second homes at recreational sites, rural retirement residences and a few country communes. In spite of efforts by some members of the Congress to promote the decentralization of industry to rural areas, no comprehensive legislation has been enacted and relatively little progress toward rural resettlement has been achieved.

The rural schools have been quite effective in promoting the assimilation of the descendants of northern European immigrants, many of whom settled on farms. Such schools have been less effective in helping to bring about the assimilation of Spanish speaking people, many of whom are farm workers, and perhaps least effective in the attempt to assimilate American Indians who live on rural reservations.

It is my impression, based on personal experience, observation and reading, that except for high school courses in vocational agriculture few, if any, public schools in rural areas have provided (or now provide) any training that is only applicable to rural living and/or farm work. A generation or so ago, some of the Land Grant Colleges operated secondary schools of agriculture. I attended one myself for three winters in lieu of high school. But so far as I know, these "Aggie Schools" have disappeared. The Cooperative Extension Services conduct conferences, short courses and workshops for farmers and rural homemakers; Extension also operates the 4-H Club program; nothing comparable to the Danish Folk School has been established on a continuing basis in the USA.

## An Appraisal of Rural Education

There is widespread consensus among educators that the quality of rural education is substandard. Robert Isenberg said at the May 1969 Workshop on the Quality of Rural Living, "In view of the direct relationship

between the quality of education and the quality of living, it can be asserted that rural people have a history of being short-changed." (Proceedings p 71) Dr. Isenberg alleged that great improvements have been made but the results of the 1969-70 National Assessment of Educational Progress of Young Americans (ages 9, 13, 17 and 26 to 35) sponsored by the Education Commission of the States showed that residents of remote rural areas ranked below the national average in scientific knowledge and skills (AAAS Bulletin, Feb. 1972) although they ranked above residents of the inner city.

It should be noted that these negative appraisals are based upon urban standards. There is an implicit assumption, perhaps based upon the history of rural to urban migration, that rural schools should prepare young people for urban life and nonfarm work. There is little doubt that most rural schools have been more effective in persuading youngsters that they will have to migrate than in preparing them to cope with the problems they will encounter in urban environments. (Varden Fuller, 1970) But the rural schools do not effectively prepare children to live in rural areas either for, as I pointed out earlier, only the high school courses in vocational agriculture deal with farm work and no formal course work covers rural living as such.

The deficiencies in the quality of rural education noted earlier are attributable partially to personnel problems. Rural teachers tend to be poorly prepared and to have high turnover rates due in large part to low salaries and poor prospects for promotion. Rural school budgets tend to be low because the property tax does not yield sufficient revenue. This in turn is due to low property values and to reluctance on the part of taxpayers to support expensive facilities, high salaries or expensive educational innovations. It may fairly be said, in my opinion, that it has long been the established policy of most rural school boards to keep expenses low.

Rural Redevelopment

At this point, we need to examine critically the concept of rural redevelopment. As I noted earlier, industrial and agricultural development in the USA has led to a large scale migration from the countryside to metropolitan areas. A parallel phenomenon has been the progressive erosion of traditional rural values, the decline of many small towns and the disappearance of many open country neighborhoods. Blue jeans, once the distinctive apparel of the farm worker, have been adopted as a status symbol by urban adolescents. Urban amenities including TV, automobiles, and other conveniences are ubiquitous.

There are myriad symptoms of the virtual disappearance in the USA of any distinctive rural way of life. To the extent that existing differences in life style are attributable to rural vs urban residence, they reflect mainly differences due to settlement patterns (e.g., isolated farmsteads and small towns), to inadequate community facilities, and to the relative poverty of the rural dweller which prevents him from buying the

same quantity or quality of goods and services as the urbanite. Of course, there are subcultures within both rural and urban areas with their own distinctive life styles. Both rural and urban are heterogenous rather than homogeneous.

If it is true, as I believe, that there is not much difference between rural and urban dwellers in life styles or values, what directions should rural redevelopment take? In my opinion, we cannot reconstruct or recapture any essential part of the past. Like humpty-dumpty, the parts cannot be put together again in the old pattern. Shall the new rural community be like scrambled eggs, an amorphous mass, without any distinctive structure?

To a marked degree, government sponsored efforts to promote rural development in the USA have dealt with the use of land and other natural resources. The main thrust has been economic. The creation of jobs through exploitation of natural resources has been stressed. Recently, a countervailing interest in conservation of resources through more careful management has appeared.

In my opinion, rural redevelopment in the USA (and other industrial countries) should involve (1) the creation of a viable economic base, (2) institution building to provide adequate community facilities and services and (3) providing more adequate bases for personal growth — vocational and avocational skills, better nutrition practices, self expression, etc.

## Education Policy Changes Needed for Rural Redevelopment

The question at this point is "What changes in educational policies are needed to achieve these objectives?" Let us consider each objective separately even though we recognize that they are interdependent.

### (1) The Economic Base

There is not much chance that production agriculture will provide more jobs. It is much more likely that there will be fewer production jobs on farms although the jobs that will exist are likely to require skilled rather than unskilled labor and that better wages and greater job security will characterize the jobs that remain. But there will be fewer commercial farms and fewer jobs for seasonal unskilled workers. There may be more jobs in agricultural processing and other types of agribusiness. Current agricultural education policies seem more than adequate in terms of nutritional needs.

Recreational development may be expected to flourish, especially in areas endowed with attractive natural resources such as sea coasts, lakes, rivers, forests or mountains.

As I noted earlier, many proposals have been made that industry be decentralized but the efforts to promote the relocation of industry to rural settings that have been made under various Federal programs have met with limited success. The resistance to rural industrial development, including recreational facilities, may be due in part to lack of local understanding of the alternatives. This could be remedied to some extent through appropriate adult education, some of which is already underway.

(2) Institution Building in Rural Communities

As noted earlier, many community facilities and services have disappeared like those in Oliver Goldsmith's Deserted Village and for similar reasons. Writing about the effects of rural depopulation caused by the "Enclosures" he said,

"Down, down they sink, and spread a ruin round.
E'en now the devastation is begun,
and half the business of destruction done;
E'en now, me thinks, as pondering here I stand,
I see the rural Virtues leave the land."

Unlike the situation at the time of the Enclosures it is no longer essential for every small community to have a full complement of economic and social institutions, if the residents have convenient access to such institutions as stores, churches, hospitals and schools.

Changes in educational policies are probably not crucial to the revival or construction of community service institutions at convenient locations, although education concerning community organization procedures might be helpful. Consequently, the major emphasis in the remainder of this paper will be on improvement of the quality of education in rural communities.

(1a) Adult Education Programs

This is an aspect of development to which rural sociologists could make a direct contribution. This can be accomplished by educating change agents to understand the nature of change in social systems so that the power structures involved can be identified and perhaps manipulated. One needed change in education policy then would be for the Cooperative Extension services to provide on a systematic basis, short courses and conferences dealing with this aspect of development. This would require some states which do not have such specialists to employ sociologists as community organization specialists.

(2a) Structural Changes Needed in the Public Schools

We should consider changes in policies needed to raise the quality of education in rural areas. These matters are relevant to rural development in general terms on the premise that an educated citizen can make a greater contribution than one who is not educated. If you agree with me

that rural development should include human resources (people) as well as natural resources, the relevance of education is more specific.

(1b) Changes in Tax Policies

Improvement of the quality of education in rural areas by providing the same types of teachers, school buildings, extra-curricular programs and curriculum now available in suburban areas would be expensive. In fact, it would cost more per student than in urban areas. It cannot be accomplished without massive financial assistance from state and Federal sources. (Proceedings 129) A year ago this did not seem like a reasonable possibility. Now that the use of the local property tax for the support of schools has been ruled by two state supreme courts to be unconstitutional, there is more hope. It now seems likely that the policy of heavy reliance on the local property tax for the support of the public schools will be changed in the near future.

This change can be expected to improve the quality of education because it would remove much of the resistance to innovations which tend to be expensive. Research indicates that most rural parents have high aspirations for their children and most of them realize that their children will have to compete for urban occupations. In many rural communities, however, decisions on tax levies are decided by property owners who do not have any children in school; since increased taxes may seriously reduce the amount of money available to older citizens for family living items, they are likely to vote against such tax levies.

(2b) Changes in Personnel Policies

At the present time, teacher turnover in rural schools is exceptionally high. Many rural teachers leave teaching entirely and most of those who continue to teach soon move to larger schools which provide higher salaries. It is my judgment that we should follow the practice of some other countries and establish a state supported educational organization in each state to employ all public school teachers and assign them to various locations.

These state school organizations should provide salaries, career lines, and fringe benefits on the basis of qualifications and performance rather than size of school. Such a system could remove the economic penalities now involved in teaching in rural schools. If necessary, it would be possible to require all teachers to serve in rural areas for a specified period.

A somewhat comparable model is the Australian Teachers' Service, a national organization which provides for educational services in the "Outback" as well as in urban areas.

Establishment of a uniform salary scale with appropriate incentives for upgrading of qualifications and for satisfactory performance should improve the quality of instruction, counseling and related work and promote long-term commitments to the teaching profession.

(3b) Organizational Changes

Under the Federal constitution, education is a state responsibility and every American state has a chief school officer who is in charge of a state department of education that is responsible for certification of teachers, curriculum, allocation of state revenues to local districts and some aspects of teacher training. These departments do not have jurisdiction over colleges and universities. The states have delegated many responsibilities to regional, county and local school districts.

In recent years, a number of states have established regional service agencies which have superseded county school superintendents. These agencies provide specialized services such as instruction materials centers, diagnostic clinics, data processing centers, curriculum and staff development programs, vocational and technical education programs (Proceedings, 73-74). In this way, some of the disadvantages of rural location are being overcome.

As a matter of policy, local school directors throughout the USA generally have the authority to hire and fire teachers. Although local boards do not have much jurisdiction over the core courses in the curriculum, they do have authority with respect to optional courses and extracurricular programs. Furthermore, and this is very important, local boards have authority to approve budgets (subject to voter approval in the case of expenditures which require local property tax levies that exceed specific limits).

If the local property tax base becomes of minor importance, as suggested earlier and if local control over hiring and firing of teachers and administration is surrendered to a state education agency, local boards will lose most of their power. They will probably be retained as advisory bodies, perhaps with veto power over certain types of actions.

(4b) Curriculum Changes

There is rather wide agreement in the USA that one of the principal functions of the school system is to prepare young people for the world of work. It is not expected, however, that elementary schools or even secondary schools will prepare students to perform complicated technical work. Preparation for technical, professional and managerial work is therefore obtained in vocational/technical schools, institutions of higher learning or in the case of certain occupations such as the construction crafts, through apprenticeship. The public schools are expected to provide students with occupationally relevant communication skills and some training in problem solving. In addition, students may be given some assistance in making a suitable occupational choice.

Students of rural to urban migration have found that better educated young people are more likely to migrate than the poorer students. Many years ago, Dr. E. A. Ross noted this loss of leadership. He said,

> "...natural leaders are key persons. Not only is it they who start good things, but they keep up to the mark the various agencies which minister to the higher life of the community, such as the church, the school, the debating society, the grange, the rural club. Often one notes a sad slump in the religious, social and recreative life of the neighborhood after a few families of unusual ability have moved away. ... one comes upon communities which remind one of fished-out ponds populated chiefly by bullheads and suckers." (New Age Sociology p 57)

Although I cannot agree with the view that the people who are left behind have no capacity for leadership, this "purple passage" dramatizes an important issue. For adequate development most rural communities do need competent occupational specialists, including government officials, teachers and organizational leaders. We must look to the educational system to provide much of the necessary training.

The U.S. Office of Education is in the process of awarding five year grants to five rural school systems to enable them to develop innovative educational programs which may be "transportable" to other rural schools. These experiments will be carefully observed to capture the essentials of successful processes as well as measuring outcomes.

An essential aspect of the process of occupational development, at least for males, involves early selection of a suitable occupational field, followed by relevant educational preparation. Existing policies to provide occupational guidance are seldom adequately implemented. This is especially true in rural school systems which may not have full-time or adequately trained vocational counselors. A possible solution to this problem is an approach that might be called occupational guidance through the curriculum in all grades K-12. (Hilverda and Slocum, 1969). This approach draws virtually all teachers into the guidance process by encouraging them to emphasize the occupational relevance of their subject.

Such an approach, if coupled with the view discussed in greater detail later, that ability is not severely restricted by genetic factors but is created in response to opportunity and encouragement by "significant others" and developed through experience, has the potential for rescuing and rehabilitating many school failures and converting them into effective workers and citizens.

Economic aspects of development are affected greatly by the range of trained occupational specialists and community leaders available to perform useful work. It is reasonable, in my opinion, to take the position that Robert E. L. Faris did in his presidential address to the American Sociological Association in 1962, that universal education in the USA has added a whole new dimension to our National capacity. In his words—

> "... the nation is quietly lifting itself by its bootstraps [through education] to an importantly higher level of general ability--an achievement, which though less dramatic than a space voyage to the moon and less measurable than the Gross National Product, may mean more to the national future than either." (Faris, ASR. 26, 6 p. 839)

To the extent that rural communities resemble the fished-out ponds that E. A. Ross wrote about, human resources are not being developed adequately. There is no fundamental reason, so far as I know, why the quality of education or of life generally should have to be inferior in any community, rural or urban. The courts have held that equality of education is a national policy supported by the constitution. The problem is that the policy has not yet been put into effect.

(3) Educational Policies Affecting Personal Development

As a society, Americans have not given much attention to the processes of personal development. We have been and continue to be more interested in the development of technology and the exploitation of natural resources.

There are some indications, however, that we may have reached a major turning point. Technological change is no longer automatically classified as progress. Environmental protection has become a paramount issue. Consumer protection, following the lead of Ralph Nader, has become ubiquitous. Sociology and the other social sciences are popular on college campuses. The rights of the individual accused of crime sometimes appear to transcend those of the victim. There appears to be wide approval of the view that everyone should "do his own thing".

Even though Arthur Jensen (1969) recently provided considerable support for the widely shared view that the principal determinant of intelligence (abstract reasoning ability) is heredity, the contrary view, namely that environmental factors are of greater importance, appears to be gaining. It will not be possible here to discuss the details of this controversial issue but since it is relevant to my further remarks, I will make my position explicit. In my judgment, genetic factors do establish rather broad limits to personal development. However, I also think that environmental factors, especially the social environment, are of paramount importance in determining the extent and nature of personal development, including the ability to handle abstract concepts. The social psychology of George Herbert Mead as applied to education by Brookover and Erickson (1969), provides a challenging theoretical perspective for stimulating personal development through the conscious efforts of teachers and other socially significant persons. However, I believe that it is not only possible but desirable to go beyond dyadic exchanges and to involve, at the cognitive level, the collective power of reference groups to direct and control the behavior of members. The model that I have in mind is the traditional farm family in which father, mother and children all collaborated in mutual socialization of all members but I see no reason why school related groups should not do essentially the same thing. In fact, according to Urie Bronfenbrenner, the Soviets

have built this type of socialization into their educational system. He says that the Soviet schools are able to utilize the power of the peer group in a constructive way, so that whenever groups of children are together they are likely to be engaged in constructive activities whereas in the USA unsupervised peer groups are likely to get into mischief. (Bronfenbrenner 1969)

James Coleman (1966) suggested greater use of peer groups in ways supportive of the educational process and he subsequently designed some learning games to do this.

So far as personal development potential are concerned, I do not see any fundamental difference between rural and urban schools. The goal of such development so far as the educational system is concerned, should be to encourage and assist individuals to develop their abilities so that they can win recognition for achievements valued by society, by their reference groups and by individuals who are important to them.

Following this line of thought I would like to suggest:

1. That parents, especially parents of very young children, should be encouraged to participate more actively in the educational process by giving recognition for educational achievements of their children.

Research by sociologists and others indicates that educational values and achievements of children are positively influenced by favorable recognition (rewards) from parents and other persons (significant others) who are important to them.

Many children are apparently defeated during the first year or two in school and subsequently view themselves as unable to succeed as scholars. Consequently, it seems imperative that major efforts be made to provide additional social reinforcement at that time.

2. That teachers should be encouraged to make greater use of immediate recognition and other rewards (operant conditioning) as a means of stimulating children to greater achievement.

Experimental work by Dr. Bruce Chadwick with children from farm worker families and Indian children indicates that even children from disadvantaged families can be motivated to higher levels of educational achievement within a system which provides immediate tangible rewards for such achievement.

## Concluding Remarks

What I am arguing for is parity with suburbia. As I indicated earlier, I do not favor a neo-agrarian policy. Paraphrasing a current T.V. commercial on driving, "let's make rural living a good thing again", but not by trying to return to the horse and buggy. I was reared on a farm where the main power sources were horses and men. Some people may be nostalgic about such farms, I am not. I remember the hard monotonous dirty work. There must be a better way.

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